ANDRAGOGICAL EDUCATION: ASSUMPTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

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Adults are a vital part of any educational program. Increased numbers of adults are returning to universities for their initial professional educational development. In addition, responsible individuals who want to keep abreast of their field are engaging in more and more lifelong learning efforts. Apps states that:

A quiet revolution is taking place on college and university campuses across this country . . . the return of thousands of adults to college campuses, adults who may have attended college for one or more years and then dropped out, adults who may have received a baccalaureate degree but find need for additional education, and adults who may never have attended college.¹

Defining the term "adult" is not an easy task. Depending on the educator's theory of learning, an adult educationally may be defined in different ways. For the purposes of this article, adults are defined as persons of post-secondary education age who perform roles typically assigned them by our culture and who psychologically perceive themselves to be responsible for their own lives.

With the current influx of adult learners into education courses and with an increased recognition of the unique differences of adults, teacher educators need to examine their traditional approach to teaching and in-service education. Adult learners are different than youth learners. Therefore, there is a need for a different approach and specialized training for those who will be working with adult learners. This paper examines the assumptions and implications of a teaching approach more appropriate for adult learners.

Over the years there has been one basic theoretical framework for teaching, which is known as pedagogy — the art and science of teaching children. This involves teacher-directed learning. Pedagogy keeps the learner in a dependent role and limits learning activities within strict boundaries set by the teacher. The student's major role is to react to the teacher's stimuli. This method of teaching makes assumptions about the learner which are not appropriate for adults:

* the learner is essentially a dependent individual;
* the learner's experience is limited and narrow in scope;
* the learner is not ready to learn until prompted;
* the learner is subject-centered rather than problem-centered, and,
* the learner's motivation is triggered by external rewards and punishments.²

The teacher education profession is well versed in pedagogical skills, thus problems may arise when educators are faced with the prospect of teaching adults.³ Educators who have worked with adults verify that many of the techniques used in teaching secondary students are of little use when working with an adult group. Recent thought into the appropriate learning theory for adults has developed into an approach that is called "andragogy," an approach which may facilitate the learning of adults better than traditional methods have.

The Theory of Andragogy
Andragogy is "the art and science of helping adults learn."⁴ It assumes that adults and children do not learn in exactly the same ways and is built around the concept of self-directed learning. Five major assumptions set andragogy apart from pedagogy:

* as a person matures he or she moves from dependence to increased self-directedness;
* past experience serves as a basis for new learning;
* readiness to learn is related to events in a person's life;
* adults tend to have a problem-solving orientation to learning; and,
* adults are motivated by internal incentives.

Concept of the Learner
The self-concept aspect of andragogy is one of the most important when dealing with adults in an educational setting.⁵ Andragogy assumes that adults are independent, self-directing persons rather than dependent personalities who are always told what to do and how to think. Students in education, on the whole, are capable of being as self-directed and independent as most adult students.⁶ However, if adult learners are placed in a position where they are treated like children, resentment and resistance often occur. The most visible result of this resistance is the decline in attendance that often occurs during continuing educational activities.
The teacher-educator can utilize various techniques to reduce the barriers which impede an adult's concept toward independence and self-directedness. The learning environment can be made physically and psychologically more conducive to adult learning. Furnishings and equipment should be adult-sized and comfortable. Rooms should also be arranged informally. A podium on a stage, for example, may make adult students feel that the teacher is being condescending. Tables and chairs arranged in a circle allow for a much greater degree of face-to-face communication and produce more adult-type relationships. Of course, the rooms should also have good acoustics and lighting. The psychological climate set by the instructor should cause adults to feel accepted, respected, and supported. A friendly and informal atmosphere tends to make people feel more independent, especially if each person is known by his own name and valued as a unique individual.

Andragogy places great emphasis on the involvement of adult learners in the process of self-diagnosis. Teacher-educators describe the levels of competence or the professional characteristics a proficient instructor is required to achieve in a changing educational environment. Adult learners can assess their own levels of competence or their professional capabilities against those portrayed in the instructor's model. This form of self-diagnosis helps the learner to measure the gaps between his present skills and those required by the professions. This experience usually provides the adult learner with a clear sense of direction and a strong motivation to learn.

Once the needs of the class are diagnosed, its teacher and students should both be involved in the planning process and in the formulation of the course's educational objectives. Teacher-educators should utilize such groups as representative class councils, special committees, task forces, or other class-member groups to make the class feel a part of the planning. The educator's role in this is somewhat different than a traditional "teacher's" role. This role is redefined to make the educator more of a procedural technician, resource person, or co-inquirer.

In addition, the learning plan that the class agrees upon could be formalized through the construction and signing of individual learning contracts. A learning contract states the learning objectives, identifies learning resources and strategies, defines what shall be accepted as evidence of accomplishment, and outlines the criteria and means for validating the evidence. This means that the responsibility for evaluation is not fully the teacher's, but that it is shared by the student as well. The contract also serves as an instrument for rediagnosing an individual's learning needs after the completion of the session.

**Role of Experience**

Adult learners tend to have a greater accumulated reservoir of experience than younger students taught in secondary schools. The adult learner's experiences become a rich resource for learning, because new material can be related to the learner's already internalized experiences, assuring that the new material will be learned more quickly and retained longer. In addition, some adults involved in education may possess more knowledge about a particular subject, procedure, or technique than the teacher-educator. It is essential for the teacher-educator to recognize, without being threatened, that adults have this kind of knowledge. Then, it is important to use this knowledge in the classroom setting.

The differences between adult learners and children have several implications for teacher-educators. Teacher-educators must place greater emphasis on those techniques that tap the experience of the adult learners. These techniques commonly include group discussions, the case method of analysis, role-playing, field projects, classroom or laboratory demonstration, and simulation exercises. The andragogical approach favors such interactional techniques over simple transmittal techniques such as lectures or "canned" audiovisual presentations. Andragogical or experiential techniques provide learners with the opportunity to participate, plan, and even rehearse the application of their learning in day-to-day life.

**Readiness to Learn**

An adult's readiness to learn contrasts sharply with that of the child learner. Andragogy makes the assumption that learners are ready to learn when they have some need to fulfill. An adult's readiness to learn arises from the realization that he needs more information and training. Educational programs can be arranged to meet these professional needs once they are diagnosed. Readiness to learn and educational programs can be stimulated by teacher-educators through the self-diagnostic techniques mentioned above, through the students' exposure to better models of performance, and through attainment of higher levels of aspiration by students.

Two sets of implications flow from this difference between an adult's and a child's readiness to learn. First, teacher-educators must be able to recognize or to bring about "teachable moments," that is the points at which adults are most receptive to learning. The design of a course curriculum and its sequence of tasks must be in step with the learner's development. In other words, teacher-educators must first stimulate the student's need to learn and then plan a course around the needed information or training. The second implication is concerned with the grouping of learners. Adult learning activities should allow individual learners to interact with
A teacher-education program for adults is very important. Experiences to provide the greatest benefits in an educational setting.

Orientation to Learning

An adult’s orientation to learning is quite different from that of a child. Adults tend to be problem-centered while children, on the other hand, are taught subject matter to be applied in the future. Because of this, the structure of a teacher-education program for adults is very important. In the first place, teacher-educators must be attuned to the professional concerns of adult students and must develop courses and methods of instruction that will reflect the adult learners’ experience and concerns. Secondly, the organization of the curriculum should be problem-centered, rather than topic-centered. Action-learning techniques such as discussions, simulations, field experiences, and question-and-answer sessions provide the high level of interaction that adults require. The course design should also permit the class and its individuals to participate in the identification of each session’s problems and to explore various approaches to their solutions.

Motivation

The motivation of adult learners also differs from that of child learners. The pedagogical approach assumes that learners are primarily motivated by external rewards and punishments, such things as grades, diplomas, degrees, and fear of failure and fear of reprimand. Andragogy, on the other hand, assumes that learners are motivated by internal incentives: curiosity, the desire to grow, the need to solve a specific problem, and the satisfaction of accomplishment. Obviously, teacher-educators’ assumptions about their adult students will influence their class presentations directly and, through their presentations, influence how interested and motivated the adult learners remain. The andragogical implication of this for the teacher-educator is that adult learners must be allowed to act out primary motives. They must be given the opportunity to participate in the planning, diagnosis of needs, the setting of objectives, and the design of individualized learning plans and activities. Learners who have some “ownership” in the educational process stay motivated longer than those who do not, which tends to influence both the quality and the amount of their learning.

Conclusion

The two approaches to learning theory, pedagogy and andragogy, are not strictly dichotomous, but rather form a continuum. There are some situations in which pedagogical assumptions may be quite appropriate for adult learners; for example, in areas where they have no prior knowledge or experience. Teaching new procedures or techniques may require that the teacher assume a traditional role until the adult learner acquires enough content to enable a self-directed inquiry to begin.

The process elements of andragogy are quite different from those of pedagogy. The andragogical process requires that a teacher-educator establish a conducive climate for adult learners. Class planning, both class and individual diagnosis of needs, and the setting of objectives should involve both the learner and the educator. Learning contracts should be used to spur an adult’s readiness to learn and to provide him the degree of self-directiveness that is desirable. Inquiring projects, independent study, and experiential techniques must take precedence over learning activities that use simple lecture techniques or assigned readings. The final evaluation process should also be clearly established beforehand, with learner’s performance validated by peers, facilitators, and other experts in the field.

The traditional role of the teacher-educator needs to adapt to changes in the student population. Educators of adults need to become facilitators of learning, rather than “lecturers” or “teachers.” Interpersonal skills are crucial in the andragogical process. Empathy, respect, and sincerity are necessary for the teacher-educator if he is to demonstrate a sense of mutual responsibility in the learning process. The new role of the facilitator also requires the ability to encourage, facilitate, and assist the adult learner in further exploration. Of course, the ultimate goal of any instruction is to obtain the highest level of achievement and performance possible for the individual student, but as Knowles states: “Andragogy assumes a teacher cannot really ‘teach’ in the sense of ‘make a person learn’ but that one person can only help another person learn.”

Exposure to the andragogical theory of adult learning can help the instructional and planning processes of teacher education. An understanding of adult learning theory and its assumptions should be important to the teacher-educator. In addition, studies have shown that individuals exposed to the andragogical model are more proactive or self-directed learners; that is, they take a higher degree of initiative and responsibility for their own learning than others. This suggests that the andragogical process is an excellent preparation for a lifetime of learning.

As more adults return to the classroom, teacher-educators need to realize that adult learners are unique. The rewards in an andragogical process are mutually realized by the teacher-educator and the adult learner. Therefore, andragogy is vital to the various educational activities which comprise teacher education.